

ORD-413-73

24 January 1973

MEMORANDUM FOR: C/IP&A/ORD

SUBJECT : Briefing by Stanford Research Institute

1. On 23 January 1973, Drs. Russell Targ and Harold Puthoff of Stanford Research Institute showed a film of their recent experiments with Uri Geller, an Israeli magician with claimed capabilities in ESP. The SRI work with Geller has been supported by Edgar Mitchell's foundation, by something with a name like Mind Science Institute of Los Angeles, and by TSD.

2. The film depicted Geller in a number of task situations. These included reproduction of line drawings from originals sealed in envelopes, guessing which face of a die enclosed in a container would be uppermost when shaking of the container ceased, guessing which one of twelve containers contained a piece of metal or some water (by successive elimination of the empty containers), and bending spoons by touching them with apparently much less force than would be required normally to bend them. If the experiments as shown on the film are accepted at face value there is strong indication that Geller possesses uncommon abilities. For except in those cases where Geller 'passed' either because of fatigue, of claimed temporary diminution of ESP abilities, or of claimed interference from hostile onlookers, Geller is said to have performed many of these tasks repeatedly under controlled conditions with no errors whatsoever (although some of the line drawings were reproduced by Geller as a mirror image of the out-of-sight originals). Targ and Puthoff presented themselves as neutral physical scientists, well aware of the hazards of dealing with a professional magician whose avowed purpose at SRI is to obtain certification as an authentic psychic, and willing to accept only experimental results that admit of no explanation through fraud, sleight-of-hand, or other trickery.

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3. Nonetheless on the basis of meetings I have attended at ARPA, whose Drs. Austin Kibler and George Lawrence have been to SRI to observe Geller, Puthoff and Targ in action, there is serious doubt that Geller's accomplishment transcends the range of activities of a skillful magician can perform and much concern that Puthoff's and Targ's own experimental bias in favor of successful outcomes is undermining their objectivity in designing properly controlled experimental procedures. Geller's connections with Dr. A. Puharich, with whom many unsavory reports have been linked, also is disturbing. However, I personally observed at yesterday's briefing no unorthodox behavior by Puthoff or Targ that could serve to corroborate ARPA's judgment. Of course, no film is an unimpeachable record of a behavioral situation and though I doubt that SRI would risk their reputation by showing a doctored film much stranger things have happened in the not very honorable history of persons or groups claiming ESP powers.

4. It strikes me that what is of interest to CIA is not whether Geller's perceptions are sensory or extra-sensory but rather whether his capabilities are exploitable by CIA (not necessarily utilizing Geller personally: possibly others could be trained to do what he does). And indeed some one who could reproduce blueprints locked in safes without looking at the blueprints, or some one who could distinguish from a distance decoys from real missiles, would be an undoubted asset. [REDACTED] has suggested a controlled series of experiments one could undertake with Geller to see to what extent, e.g., he could draw previously unseen blueprints. (Dr. Lawrence reported that Geller balked at reproducing anything more complex than a simple line drawing.) It is also true that SRI's experiments with Geller to date have dealt exclusively with behavioral tasks and not at all with examination of Geller himself (other than a cursory EEG examination which apparently revealed nothing abnormal) and future activities with him could deal with an examination of his perceptual abilities to learn whether, e.g., his vision or hearing extends beyond normal human limits.

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5. I recommend that you discuss with appropriate persons in TSD their plans for future research at SRI, both with Geller and with other subjects such as Ingo Swann, the New York artist who reportedly slowed down a Stanford University magnetometer. It may prove worth while to explore pursuing some carefully controlled experiments with Geller over and above the experiments TSD is funding. I think the following factors should be considered carefully when reaching a decision whether to commit ORD funds for such exploratory research:

a. The past history, within and without ORD, of endeavors to substantiate claims of persons with alleged ESP powers is a history of repeated failures.

b. However, the future in principle cannot be foretold from the past. a. should serve only to influence one's prior subjective probability of the rewards to be gained by funding experiments like this.

c. [REDACTED] told me he was 'humbled' by the film; thus at least at some level of DD/S&T management there is belief that something of value may come from investing in this area.

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